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ABSTRACT

The public relations educators in the university departments that house public relations must be aware of key issues that have an impact on the quest for status and effectiveness. Failure to adhere to these concerns may turn out students who will be trapped and have a much lower level of job satisfaction. These concerns are as follows: (1) educators in disciplines offering public relations programs should be aware of what is happening in other departments offering similar programs; (2) the face of public relations is changing and academic programs and the public relations practitioner must respond to people instead of grinding out newsletters and news releases; (3) educators should stress job satisfaction and upward mobility on the job, teaching public relations students more than just technical skills but also communication and management skills; (4) public relations students should understand that making a profit is important but not at the expense of other values; (5) the gender issue is creating a new scenario in public relations--females are skilled and have resources which give another perspective to the "glass-ceiling" issue; and (6) to ignore the international and multicultural dimension of public relations may be a major weakness in public relations--more attention to this issue may give public relations students the advantage in competing for top CEO positions. (Contains 32 references.) (TB)

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The Quest for Status and Effectiveness in Public Relations: More a Question of Philosophy, Commitment to Values, and Research Development Than Academic Location

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What is the Best 'House' for Our Public Relations Programs?

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The Quest for Status and Effectiveness in Public Relations: More a Question of Philosophy, Commitment to Values, and Research Development Than Academic Location

ABSTRACT

The academic housing of public relations has been identified in a number of research pieces. Generally the most active public relations programs are housed in communication, journalism, or mass communication departments and schools. Communication departments will especially experience more growth in the future.

The quest for status and effectiveness in public relations highlights the critical differences among the academic houses of public relations in terms of 1) the question of philosophy, 2) the commitment to values, and 3) the support for research. Other major factors affecting public relations remains in the arena of the gender issue and the international/multicultural orientation of public relations education.

The Quest for Status and Effectiveness in Public Relations:

More a Question of Philosophy, Commitment to Values, and

Research Development Than Academic Location

The academic house for public relations is a picture which includes the undergraduate and graduate experience, the careers which follow in the practice of public relations and the full circle back to obtaining professional credentials. Along with these travels one senses the negative perception of public relations from the public.

The review of literature established that public relations has several academic houses. Public relations is found in business, in communication, and journalism and or mass communication. There is an occasional program located in English or an interdisciplinary effort by 2 or more departments. Where the academic "houses" for public relations programs are is a different question from where public relations should be "housed." However, here the approach to the question is stressed more in terms of how public relations should be developed in these "houses" wherever that may be.

Any academic program is established after a great deal of thought and time. For the purposes of the discussion, this paper will focus on where the public relations academic programs are and provide insights into the implications of this situation. The goal is to provide a useful interpretation of key issues which affect the "house" noting the lack of awareness various disciplines have of each other. Noted, too, will be the other forces which impinge upon public relations curriculum development: global developments, the gender issue, and the practical realities of surplus students, a deficit in qualified teachers, and the changing interpretation of what public relations is.

Academic Houses with Public Relations.

The literature has identified the houses for public relations. Wright and VanSlyke Turk note the

> continued growth in the number of public relations programs that have developed, especially within speech and speech-communication schools or departments rather than in journalism and/or mass communication schools or departments. (Wright and VanSlyke Turk, 3)

Notably little mention of public relations in business or management is documented. The few business or management departments with public relations on the undergraduate level offer generally one public relations course. Plus this course is most often narrowly focused on image building in terms of some type of business like banking. Furthermore,

these courses are primarily located in community colleges with no school or college designation. (Neff, 4)

Beyond this gross analysis of public relations growth within existing academic houses, there are other concerns which may suggest some need for reevaluating how we live within these departments that house public relations.

In reporting these findings the use of certain terminology suggests some confusion or lag in academics awareness about each other's discipline. For example, many in communication find "speech" an archaic term for naming a department, including their academic profession. True, communication departments have been historically tied to "speech" but now most of these professional and academic communication organizations have dropped "speech' and appear as Central States Communication Association, International Communication Association, Southern State Communication Association, Eastern Communication Association, and the World Communication Association. Only the Speech Communication Association narrowly defeated the renaming proposition and it is expected to evolve to communication on the next ballot to the American Communication Association.

So what is the importance of this evolution away from "speech"? If "speech" drops from association and departmental titles (which has happened in most instances), the tidy labeling of what "speech" disciplines are becomes lost. For some of these departments speech has been dropped (as in rhetoric, for example) and for other departments speech has become one "track" along with other tracks in interpersonal, organizational, public relations, advertising, broadcasting, etc.

One other misconception is categorizing "rhetoric and vocal effectiveness" as the essence of "speech" departments. (Wright and Turk, 16) For many in communication, "vocal effectiveness" is another out-of-date terminology and not representative of what is happening in the discipline. Whereas the broadcasting production area is strongly in the forefront in most of communication departments. Public relations programs are newer curriculum developments in response to the demands and pressures of student requests.

The confusion was reflected again in the 1989 meeting of the ACEJMC accreditation Council in Chicago. In response to the accreditation request from PRIG's Task Force on Accreditation from the International Communication Association, the Council repeatedly referred to "speech" departments. When the Council was corrected and asked to use the term "communication" departments, the Council was shocked that "speech" was no longer the dominate terminology. Perhaps this is why some communication departments have been accredited unknowingly by ACEJMC.

More importantly, how can the question be answered about which house is best for public relations if the professionals are not aware of each others developments? Perhaps the first need is for greater networking and contact

among professionals from different disciplines to appreciate and acknowledge the developments within a discipline.

Business, for example, is evolving toward a management concept. A number of college catalogs often do not list "business" and one has to check under the category of "management." The change from from business to management emphasizes the increased attention to the role of people in the discipline.

There is also some sensitivity between journalism and mass communication. The "and/or" is very important as sometimes these two areas strive to be as independent of each other as possible.

What this suggests is professionals from the different disciplines offering public relations need to interrelate in as many ways as possible. In many respects the variety of academic departments housing public relations are like ships passing in the night.

Public Relations has a Long History but Now Status is the Quest.

The authors of textbooks trace the origins of public relations to the early times of ancient history. (Harris, 2) At one point those in journalism flocked to public relations and heavily dominated the field. Public relations evolution has continued on with a great spurt of growth within communication departments. Now professionals have a variety of skills when entering public relations.

The push is to obtain status for public relations. The concern is not about public relations being primarily technical or viewed mainly as an entry level job. The concern really should be the type of training offered where limited skills diminishes opportunities for growth. Perhaps job satisfaction is not so much whether the field is technical or not but more if the person can do what they do best and are given opportunities for promotion. (Rentner and Bissland, 16)

PRIMARY GOAL OF EDUCATORS SHOULD BE TO PROVIDE THE PROFESSIONAL WITH THE POTENTIAL FOR JOB SATISFACTION: DOING WHAT THEY WANT TO DO WITH OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROMOTION.

If the efforts in journalism and mass communication programs are preparing the professional for a heavily technical orientation then there should be some concern about the professionals coming from this discipline. (Wright and Turk, 23) The dominance of journalism over public relations, where public relations is tolerated because of the higher enrollments, keeps the technical emphasis in place. (Fedler and Smith, 16) There will always be professionals who are happy designing newsletters and sending out press releases as a career. The question is how does a discipline prepare the professional who desires to go

beyond the technician level. Plus are there enough spots for public relations talent beyond the technician level?

At this point the problem becomes quite great. The scenario runs like this: The academics teaching are great at the technician level with skills in graphics, newswriting, annual reports etc. Many of the academics obtained these skills themselves through their professional field experience in journalism--both print and broadcasting. Yet what does it take to go beyond this point and especially to be promotable?

In a survey of top executives in Chicago, the most valued skill besides writing was interpersonal communication. Interpersonal communication was the factor that kept the client in touch with the agency, built good will for a continuing relationship, and offered strategies beyond writing for reaching their goals. (Neff, 3) In this respect, the communication departments offer expertise in speechmaking, speech writing, film, and other non-print communication channels. Especially emphasized is communication theory, persuasion, small group, interpersonal, and organizational communication. (Gibson, 29)

The question remains about the type of skills that support the idea of the quest for status. Are these the skills that give the professional the involvement in the highest decision making realms? What has come forth recently is the cry for public relations to become more management oriented. Thus the push for moving towards the business/management departments.

Wright and Turk call this the "The Business School 'Scam'." (13-14) The reasoning follows that business schools are not interested in public relations and managerial skills (problem solving, strategic planning) and are already being taught in the better communication and journalism departments. Lastly, the academics in business are not qualified to teach public relations. The question at this point is: if the better communication and journalism schools are teaching the management skills, why are the public relations professionals not in the ranks of management?

Is a Management Orientation the Answer?

Presently the public relations position in corporations is one of the "fast-tracks" to the executive top. "Top managers in the organizations for which respondents worked (mass media industries) are most likely to come from the financial area (81.7%), with public relations the second-most-likely functional area to supply top managers (35.2%), a finding not particularly surprising since close to half of the respondents worked for corporations of one type or another or for public relations firms." (Turk, 42) The concern, however, is that the public relations office is being used for entry level management by those who are not

public relations professionals. The implication being that those without public relations experience can handle public relations activities. (Neff, CSCA-SSCA 9) Thus the public relations position may be the conduit for producing upper level management but those in public relations may not be occupying the position.

Executives will state that people are promoted to CEO positions not for management skills but for leadership skills. Those that supervise well will be kept supervising. Those that inspire and empower people will be promoted to the decision making level.

Presently much of the research in public relations focuses on the desirability of training people for the management level which fits into systems theory which describes processes of organizations. Unfortunately like the multicultural researchers found when applying systems theory to multicultural issues, systems theory is not very powerful. Systems theory is not powerful because it mainly describes and does not explain. Similarly, the models of public relations, although very useful in describing what happens in certain realms of public relations, is not very effective in explaining public relations. Public relations needs more powerful theories to explain not just describe public relations functions. §Pavlik, 1989; Lauzen and Dozier, 1989; Grunig and Grunig, ACEJMC 1990; Grunig, IABC 1990; Grunig and Grunig, Seminar 1990)

Harris in his presentation on the future of public relations indicated that public relations professionals will have to produce concrete evidence their strategies are working. Basically Harris stressed "the days of blind faith are over." While "ad people can hide behind recall scores," public relations professionals need to prove their success stories. (Harris, 10)

The quest for status will happen only if public relations educators focus more on leadership than management skills.

The desire for providing evidence of effectiveness in public relations suggests that a greater emphasis in research skills will be necessary in training public relations professionals. The question is now for what reason? Should public relations professionals be trained just to enhance the bottom line of an organization or more for community development. Again, perhaps public relations professionals should look more to the larger goal of public relations and not be so tied to business. The management model inspired by corporate philosophies may be too narrow for the good of public relations development.

In summary, public relations should be moving to the more powerful concept of leadership not management which would look more for community development and not just the financial bottom line of an organization.

Other Issues--Gender

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Studies have established the salary gap between males and females when factors of experience, age, and job type are controlled. (Toth, AEJMC 1990; Schaible and Russell, ICA 1990; Fallon, ECA 1990) Even greater concern is the issue of the feminization of the public relations field. The influx of females in public relations lowering salaries for the profession.

The fear has reached such proportions that the faculty at Dorsett Institute in England are considering restricting the number of females admitted to the public relations program. The next issue that surfaces immediately is the documented evidence that the female candidates are far better qualified then the males. Lowering the quality of the candidates becomes a reality when admittance quotas are established.

But this concern about the "quality" of the public relations professional is not limited to just the academic recruitment of students. A representative of Hill and Knowlton decried the lack of qualified male candidates for a top CEO position. He noted that finding a qualified female was not a problem but Hill and Knowlton did not want a female in on the top executive level. Yet the position was in danger of not being filled and not been filled for a long time. Hill and Knowlton's search is worldwide and the same dialogue is being conducted in their British agency. (Neff, 1990).

So the issue is not strictly the lack of qualified candidates for public relations programs or top level management positions. The issue is the inability to attract qualified males to public relations programs and management positions. How long major companies are willing to hold out? The chief CEO Edelman of Edelman Worldwide recently shared his woes in not finding a suitable male candidate. He has interviewed a female for a top level management position but the female asked what he thought was an outrageous amount of money. The bottom line on this approach is women once could be bought cheap for high level positions but today females are not willing to settle for the bottom of the barrel. Females in the past were a good deal because they worked harder then males and worked cheaper then males. Females are now more aware of their worth and more skilled in negotiating that worth. Others are satisfied to be on the technician level to accommodate a life style which allows a more personal life.

Females are more aware and in more control of the resources necessary to reach the highest levels of leadership.

But other disciplines are feeling the same pressures from the females. Female graduate Deans in communication schools indicate the pressure for increased restriction of female admittance to academic positions and programs is getting stronger. A major organization representing vetenarians wishes to screen out females because of their

tendency to go into small animal programs and the fear is that large animals will be neglected. The large animals is where the commercial profits are made.

Cline reported a personal experience where "male macho bonding" excluded the female professors from participating in an activity. (Cline, McBride, Pierce, 1990) Today females are aware and trained to appreciate their worth and negotiate positions and salaries which are equal to their worth. If thwarted a new response is being developed. Females are starting their own companies. Now if these female CEO's do not pay themselves or their employees salaries equal to the male structure or greater then the cry of females lowering the salary level in public relations is really their own decision. However, these female CEO's should decide if the salaries the earlier male CEOs paid themselves reflected greed or their worth.

Female CEO's tend to hire predominately females. The male is included sometimes for diversity or for bringing in a different point-of-view. There is not necessarily a separatist movement going on but there is a strong support system for females.

Other Issues--Multicultural and International

The importance of preparing public relations professionals in international and multicultural areas is highlighted by recent developments. The Irish Association of Consultants stated that whereas the United States was once looked to for public relations leadership it seems that Europe now, particularly with the European Economic Community, is the leader. (Neff, Irish 3) Only one major public relations firm continues under American ownership. Golin and Harris is really Shandwick of England. The world network is shrinking but the multicultural understanding is not always keeping pace.

Peter Osgood, Vice Chairman of HIll and Knowlton, Inc. sums up the situation as "act locally and think globally." (Neff, ICA 3). In a survey of 31 top CEO's of public relations firms in the United States, knowledge of public relations is the most frequently first ranked requirement. One probably would think a public relations background would be a given. However, as mentioned earlier, the public relations position is the conduit for obtaining CEO status. As one of the fast-tracks to the board room, many do not have a public relations background. But when all ranked responses were added International relations-cultural experience and business experience were tied as the most frequently mentioned requirement. For most firms the ideal public relations professional would be someone trained in public relations with an international and business background.

The five-course model of public relations curriculum recommended by the 1987 AEJMC-PRSA Commission study does not include international public relations. A sixth area or recommended area outside of the model courses covers a

recommended list of areas of study. Eight areas are ranked and international public relations is ranked the lowest at 4.50 on a scale of 7. (Commission, 4987) In a review of the 576 departments having public relations courses, only 7 international public relations courses were identified out of 1,265 courses reviewed.

The gap between the professional demands and the education of the public relations professional point to an incredible problem that is emerging in public relations. Professionals are not being prepared for the reality of what is happening in public relations. Whereas the public relations position in international oriented corporations should be held by a public relations expert, many positions are really held by those without public relations background. Yet this is the conduit to top level management decision making. It would seem that leaders in the public relations field are missing a wonderful opportunity.

Summary

The questions of where public relations should be housed becomes more a question of what is happening in the departments housing public relations. Several items should be noted and include:

1. Disciplines offering public relations should be aware of what is happening in each others disciplines. A lack of awareness suggests a great lack of coordination and cooperation in the training and preparation of professionals. It is silly, for example, to have two accrediting systems competing and not talking with each other and suggests some very grave differences in preparing public relations professionals.
2. The quest for status has evolved to just a more sophisticated level of technician. Instead of grinding out newsletters and news releases, the public relations practitioner is supervising people. If the quest for status is important then leadership not management should be stressed. But, again, what is so terribly wrong with a number of public relations professionals in technician positions whether in graphics or management?
3. Job satisfaction should be stressed and in this for most people is being promotable. Here is a wonderful standard to hold up to each student. What makes a person promotable? This is where the technician skills appear to be a diservice. Technician skills are not the skills that move people up the ladder. Students should be aware of this and that should say something about journalism and mass communication departments worry about being too technical.
4. The quest for proving public relations effectiveness is obviously moving the field toward more research skills. But there may be a larger obligation that is being defined here. Public relations professionals

should have the responsibility for doing more than satisfying the bottom line. Making a profit is important but not at the expense of other values. Community development as described by Kruckeberg and Starck is certainly the preeminent goal for public relations. This higher level standard brings public relations to a much greater level of status. A level that may be more lasting.

5. Besides the quest for status and effectiveness, two other issues are of major importance. The gender issue is creating a new scenario in public relations. Females are more skilled in negotiations and have more resources. This may change the face of public relations and most certainly may give another perspective to the "glass-ceiling" issue. The dominance of females in public relations may not have the severe impact once thought.

6. To ignore the international and multicultural dimension of public relations may be a major weakness in public relations. More attention to this area may also give public relations professionals the advantage when competing for top CEO positions.

Generally, the public relations educators in the departments that house public relations must be aware of the key issues which have impact on the quest for status and effectiveness. Failure to adhere to these concerns may turn out students who will be trapped and have a much lower level of job satisfaction. Educators must be more creative in developing public relations programs on the graduate level. Schools may not turn out Ph.D.'s in public relations but courses can be developed, independent study can add to the public relations experience, internships, and research in public relations would be most important of all. Any of the departments housing public relations could begin work in these areas immediately. However, if the mentality that public relations is solely a technical field and people are trained primarily at this level then the future will not be very promising for public relations.

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